Cultural Analysis of School Leadership Practices within Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Countries

A. Background

Various theories of school leadership have been widely developed and disseminated, particularly since 1980s when it was found as one of determinant factors of school effectiveness. At least, 20 specific leadership concepts grouped into six models of school leadership were identified in 121 articles from four English-language international journals of educational administration with the oldest year of publication in 1988 (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach, 1999). Most of school leadership models were developed in Western countries, mostly by Anglo American researchers (Walker & Dimmock, 2002; Bell & Bush, 2003) and then proposed as ideal models to be implemented for school improvement in many countries around the world including Asian countries. This phenomenon has lasted for many years (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). The United States has been the largest producer and exporter of management theories covering such key areas as motivation, leadership, and organization for about sixty years (Hofstede, 2007).

Globalization, facilitated by the advance of information technology, has been increasing this phenomenon and making it more complex (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Globalization allows fast flows of ideas across countries. Western ideas, polices, and practice of school leadership spread fast to other countries without time and place restrictions. Meanwhile, at the same time, the enviable performance in mathematics and science of East and South-East Asian students has been a focus of

interest in western education systems, which have sought to learn and adopt practices from education systems in other countries, for example Japan and China.

Are school leadership models developed in western countries suitably applied in Asian countries? Leadership theories and practices are influenced by societal cultures and cultural differences that exist between countries. The cultural differences are quite significant between western and eastern countries (Hofstede, 1997, 2007; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Therefore, it is likely that there will be cultural clashes when school leadership theories, policies, and practices are imported from one system/country to another. Moreover, each of models of school leadership has been developed in a particular context and culture to meet the challenges faced by schools in that context at that time. There is no single school leadership model should be assumed to be universally valid (Gunter, 2001; Mulford, 2008)

Based on the work of Hofstede (1997) and Dimmock & Walker (2005), who argue the societal cultures influence leadership both in theorization and practice, this project aims to provide cultural analyses of school leadership practices within four selected Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries: China, Hong Kong, Thailand and Indonesia. The school leadership today, the cultural perspective, the societal cultures within ASEAN countries, are discussed as a basis for on doing the cultural analysis. Thus, this project consists of four separate but related subsections.

Subsection 1 examines theories of school leadership. This subsection discusses why and when school leadership became identified as an influential domain in schooling. I will examine definitions and models of school leadership which are not universally valid. I will also discuss the dominance of western paradigms on school leadership in both theories and practices in many countries around the world including Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

Sub section 2 examines the cultural perspective of school leadership. Debates around the cultural perspective, the relationship between cultures and school leadership practices and the conceptual framework of using cultural and cross-cultural analyses for comparative study of school leadership is presented and explained. Included in this section is the examination of the concepts of societal cultures including their definition, characteristics, dynamics, and their contribution to understand school leadership practice This section also examines two kinds of cultural studies on school leadership: qualitative and quantitative which both are important.

Sub section 3 will examine societal cultures in ASEAN countries. The interrelationship of societal cultures and school leadership practices in selected ASEAN countries, which are China, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Indonesia, is the major concern of this project. Thus, descriptions of societal cultures of these four countries are explored. These descriptions are mainly based on Hofstede's (1997) but are also combined with Dimmock & Walker's (2002) work. Hofstede proposes

five dimensions of societal cultures, including: power distance (PD); Individualism-Collectivism (IC); Masculinity – Feminity (MF); Uncertainty Avoidance (UA); and Long Term and Short Term (LS).

Sub section 4 will examine the influence of societal cultures and school leadership practices within the four selected ASEAN countries. This subsection consists of two part: 1) cultural analysis of school leadership practices within four selected ASEAN countries, and 2) some implications for school leadership practices based on cultural perspectives.